

The School Health Index: Helping Students Get Ready to Learn

Promoting healthy and safe behaviors is part of the fundamental mission of schools—to provide young people with the knowledge and skills they need to become healthy and productive adults. Improving students' health and safety can

- Increase their capacity to learn
- Reduce absenteeism
- Improve their physical fitness and mental alertness

To help schools meet these challenges, CDC developed the *School Health Index (SHI): A Self Assessment and Planning Guide*. The SHI enables schools to

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of their health and safety policies and programs
- Develop action plans for improving student health, which can be incorporated into school improvement plans
- Engage teachers, parents, students, and the community in promoting health

Focusing on Key Health and Safety Issues

The SHI helps schools promote healthier, safer behaviors in the following critical areas:

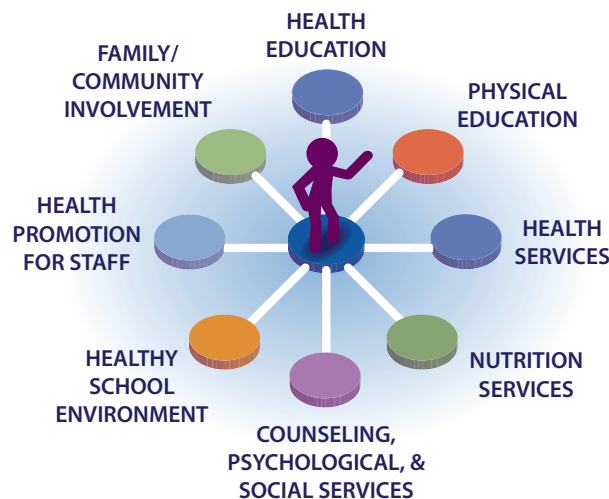
- Physical activity and physical education
- Nutrition
- Tobacco use prevention
- Asthma
- Unintentional injury and violence prevention (safety)
- Sexual health, including HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy prevention

Unhealthy behaviors (such as inadequate physical activity; unhealthy eating; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; behaviors that contribute to unintentional injury and violence; and sexual behaviors that may result in HIV infection, other STDs, and unintended pregnancy) are associated with the leading causes of death, disability, hospitalization, and illness in the United States. These behaviors are often established during childhood or adolescence and persist into adulthood. School health programs can help students establish healthy behaviors early in life, with positive results that are both immediate and long lasting.

How the School Health Index Works

The SHI is based on CDC's research-based guidelines for school health programs, which identify the policies and practices most likely to be effective in reducing youth health risk behaviors.

The SHI contains eight modules, structured around CDC's eight-component model of Coordinated School Health.



The SHI has two overarching activities to be completed by teams from your school:

- The **self-assessment process** brings members of your school community together to discuss what your school is already doing to promote good health and to identify strengths and weaknesses. It allows you to assess the extent to which your school implements the types of policies and practices recommended by CDC.
- The **planning for improvement process** then enables you to identify actions your school can take to improve its performance. It guides you through a simple process to prioritize recommendations and decide on a handful of actions to take this year. Finally, it helps you prepare a School Health Improvement Plan that lists the steps you will take to implement your actions.

The strength of the SHI process comes from having individuals from different parts of the school community sit down together and plan ways to improve their school's policies and programs. The connections that develop among SHI participants are among the most important outcomes of the process.

Costs and Resources Needed

The SHI materials are available free of charge. The main cost associated with the SHI is time. Many of the improvements you will want to make after completing the SHI can be done with existing staff and resources. For priorities that do require new resources, your SHI results can help you make the case to gain school board and community support. A small investment in time can pay big dividends in improving students' well-being, readiness to learn, and prospects for a healthy life.

What Others Are Saying

First released in 2000, the SHI has been used by schools in nearly every state, Canada, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia. It is designed for use at the school level but can be adapted for use at the district level.

School administrators and staff members who have used the SHI have said:

"The School Health Index was easy to use and enabled us to clearly identify what is working and what needs to be improved."

"It's a real energizer—it makes you think of ideas that are relatively easy to implement."

"The school staff had a very positive attitude toward the SHI. They liked its comprehensive view of health promotion and its involvement of many different stakeholders."



The SHI is available at no cost in both elementary school and middle school/high school versions.

Get started today at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHI; select either the interactive, customizable online tool or the downloadable, printable version.

For More Information

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A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for HIV/AIDS,
Viral Hepatitis, STD, and
TB Prevention